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EDITORIAL

THE last three years of the decade which has just come to an end have been remarkable for a very definite slackening of interest in contemporary poetry. It is not necessary to go into the many reasons for this here. It is enough to say that all of us who are vitally concerned in maintaining the continual flow of the tradition of English poetry the picture has been an increasingly depressing one. It is to their credit that the Arts Council of Great Britain through the efforts of Mr. C. Day Lewis has got together a representative body of poets, publishers of poetry, editors of poetry magazines and members of the book trade to see what can be done to alleviate the situation. There is no easy solution, for it is that strange wily beast the book-buying public which is the final arbiter of all our destinies. At the moment little more can be expected than the promotion of poetry readings. This it will be observed has already been done without any notable change in public interest. Anything, however, which may in even a small way help the poet is to be welcomed.

Some indication of the direction poetry is going to take during the new decade which is now upon us can be seen in the considerable renewal of attention to the great figures of the Romantic tradition from Wordsworth to Yeats. For readers of this magazine perhaps one of the most interesting of these will be *The Last Romantics* by Graham Hough which we review on another page. This book is the first major critical work to trace the course of Romanticism through Ruskin and Rossetti to the Symbolist movement, and the poets of the 'nineties down through Yeats to the younger poets such as Sidney Keyes.

This Winter number of Poetry Quarterly is the fortieth issue under its present editorship. It closes a dark but interesting decade. We have no intention of joining those who despair over the lost horizons, but if you really care anything for our ill-rewarded efforts to help poets send us a subscription.

HENRY TREECE

Domenico Scarlatti

(*for Grace Williams*)

The roaring, blind Castilian sun
Grins like an imbecile and crushes rocks
To a fine powder, winks at the harvest
And shrivels it to crackling husk.

Here the broad plains breed nothing
But an empty melancholy, where
The only voyagers drive mules,
Travelling painfully to sell their grain
For a handful of dry olives. Out of cracks
And fissures, the dusty lizards creep,
Mindless, to stare across sun-frozen wastes.
Yesterday, today, tomorrow; the sun shines
And sometimes a man passes;
A sheep falls, water-starved, and lies
Watching the gaunt birds gather in the skies.
Then out of the sun the dust blows up again.

Here, in the Alhambra, fountains play,
Throwing their jewelled streamers in the air.
Each fountain forms a rainbow, diamond arch,
To match the moorish glory of the walls.
Dark evergreens and tropic blossom charm
The sun-spiked eye away from endless sand.
To-night, there will be lanterns in the parks
And from each bough the cicada will vie
With bright and ribboned gipsies. All my life
I shall remember the guitars. Yes, all
My life the wailing strings will sound.

Yesterday the bulls ran in the sun,
Casting their sharp, brief shadows over sand.
'Toro! Toro!' One of the dancers lay
White with a broken blade clutched in his hand.
Then 'Estoque!' Another dancer moved
And blood gushed from his polished wand.

Should I go back to the Court?
There, in the solemn anterooms to death,
Among the soaring pillars, in the dry
And breathless air, there is no sun.
Outside, the red fiesta; but within,
There's gloom enough to drive mad youth away.
There the small princesses are locked
In their black cages. They must brood,
While other children laugh,
Upon departed glory as the priests
Intone throughout the summer afternoon.
I see their bird-like eyes and drooping heads,
Small tongues repeating prayers, regretting
pomegranates . . .

At my harpischord I can forget
The poverty and pride, the pain, the sun;
For a few hours each day my ears
Can shut themselves against the sound of bells;
Sheep-bells, mule-bells, water-carriers' bells,
But over all the stark Cathedral knell
That wears the young heart threadbare. Here
The febrile torrents of my notes invent
New brittle territories, where
All is so easy, all complete,
And where all thought is over when
The page is turned and dancing sounds have gone.

Outside, high on the Palace steps,
A legless beggar squats, showing his stumps
For copper coins. He'll sleep to-night
In some infested cave, a single crust
Between the grave and his poor withered flesh.
To-morrow, none may heed his whining cry;
His problem's solved and he will lie
Like carrion sheep, white eyes rolled back,
Enjoying absolution while the black
Emissary of God points to the blessed sun.

Oh, luckier than I, who must go one,
Lapdog in Palaces! Luckier than me,
Dreaming a gentle world of green,
Dreaming a Naples I shall never see!

JULES SUPERVIELLE

The Horse

translated by MARJORIE BOULTON

The tree with tresses knows the sound of sea
well, that great sea where we are all afloat;
and there the black horse also puts his throat,
stretching his neck as if the sea should be
fresh water; and as if he wished to leave
the dunes, and, distant, mythical, become
a horse, companion to the sheep of foam,
(the fleeces made so that our eyes believe),
to be at last the child of salty tide,
gazing on seaweed in the depths beneath.
But he must learn to linger on the strand,
still promising himself the waters wide,
resting his hopes in certitude of death,
bending his head anew to graze on land.

Deep in the Sky

translated by MARJORIE BOULTON

Turning on silence, bushy midnight sky
opens itself, with prohibition
for any star to give a single cry,
giddy with everlasting parturition. . . .

Prisoners of themselves
they burn a ruthless light
which burns and liberates
and then again rebinds,

and they repress the primal
impatience into ages
(you recognize them slightly
upon a hint of twinkling).

A sky of sable violets
smells of the infinite
and in their dust it searches
for suns by death exiled.

A long shadow nuzzles
the stars with foggy muzzle.

Groans of celestial galley-slaves are guessed,
crouched in an ageless ship among the oars,
(The ship leaves seashell murmurs on the air,
sails in eternal night without a quest,

in night which has no landings, rails nor statues,
without the kindness of futurity
which rustles still against us with its feathers
forbidding us to die.).

MAY SARTON

Two Songs

I

Lose the pain in the snow
Where all footsteps melt
And the magic trance
Bids you rise and follow
Forgetting all you felt
Except the dance, except the dance.

Lose the pain in the love
Where all being flows
Though the step is intricate
Still as through the dance you move
Silently the patern grows
To include, not to reject.

Lose the pain in the living
Where the self however haunted
Dances on because it must,
All forgiving, all forgiving.
Lose again all that you wanted
Except trust, except trust.

Lose the pain in the faith
Gladly as the dance grows graver
Love and living both let go,
Love and pain be danced to death
Yet the dancer never waver
Drawing patterns on the snow.

II

Silence is never cruel, no,
For silence holds the myths
By which we learn to measure
Reality against a world
Of magic animals and snow,
Of swords that cut proud wreaths,
Of unicorns we come to treasure
For where they kneel spring is unfurled.

In silence only the myth grows.
What is reality to keep
The truth that love has dared
Build in the air, build on the desert?
Beside the invisible rose
The real rose falls or falls asleep.
The flower of silence is a word
That no real word can touch or hurt.

And memory, the cutting sword:
Fall, the proud wreaths proudly hurled,
The fleshly roses torn and gone.
Only the myth held in the mind,
Only the myth held in the word
Resists, resists the whole real world
And stands immortal and alone,
And silence blesses it, is kind.

DAVID WRIGHT

Jankel Adler

He died alone at the bottom of a stair.
Not a famous man, but he broke silence
Against a canvas. One of the audience,
I knew his being. We are better when we are.

My personal sorrow for the death of Adler
Springs from the circle in which I move;
Those whose too great a capacity of love
Stripes and bars each like a tiger.

The Cage Born

TO GEORGE BARKER

When the door was opened, the bird
Advanced upon the sky,
Into the disclosures
Of liberty, but I heard
The cage-born one complain
With losing wing and voice,
That without a frame
The sky is hunger and loss.

TESSA SILLARS

'Lord, I Have Loved . . .'

I have rebuilt the house of my content:
—Tree-limbs lifted on long-living stones—
Filled with my own breath
The stern, distinguished shapes
Of wise inheritance.
These things prosper in the husbandry of homes,
Where sobriety and careful love are
Thought into action;
Things re-awaken and are nourished by
The touch of hands:
The warm, in-curving palm that fits
The fine-boned, infant skull
Shall open to bestow
A blessing on sweet growth.
Life-haste shall not infringe
This gentleness.
Within this calm, this
State of grace,
No trespass. Yet
Sufficient
Strangeness
I would have
In the order of my house.

Set going the standing clocks,
I will be implicated with the hours
Through moving shadows into moon-bright sleep.
My hope is that this house survives me
Out of Time.

JOHN HEWITT

Expectancy

Do all men wait like this for breaking light,
or tired of waiting, turn to check the time
with jerking gestures and a swab of words,
till grown to numbness they are content enough
to dread the pricking nerve and the stung lids?

Can one wait worthy, cramming his creeled hours
with hands for justice, brimmed with fair intentions,
flexing his mind deliberate on toys
and knowing them as such, and running again
when bugles beckon out or seem to beckon?

Is that old man, waiting with his task thrust by,
content or rapt, or brinked on weariness,
so drugged with rumours from a beaconed shore,
or gorged on glimpses, guesses, intuitions,
he has no will or power to do aught else?

I wait, Lord, for this light, in my own fashion,
not lonely on a rock with quiet mouth
but as the men who bred me, in their day,
as men in country places still, have time
to pause in the long field and answer you.

KATHLEEN RAINE

εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος

To the wild hills! To the wild hills!
I must go to the wild hills,
I must go up to the wild hills
To the windy cairn and the raven's crag
To dance on the hills, to dance on the hills!

Oh what do you seek on yon wild hills
By the windy cairn and the raven's crag?
The bleaching bone
And the trace of the wind,
The scent of heather and wild moss!

And who will you meet on the wild hills
By the windy cairn and the raven's crag?
The echo of cries and dancing feet
That stir when I call to the heart of the hills,
And the dancers come from the graves of the dead,
From past and future, the north and the east,
In the swoop of the hawk and the stamp of the sheep
In the flutter of moth and the midge's dance,
From the fox's earth and the leveret's seat.

And what is the dance you dance on the hills
By the windy cairn and the raven's crag?
The beat of the blood,
The pulse of the heart,
The course of the sun and the circling stars,
I will dance away earth,
I will dance away time
And rise in the night in an eloquent flame
Of spirit freed from its earthly form
I will dance away death on the wild hills.

When will you come home from yon wild hills,
The windy cairn and the raven's crag?
When the stars have circled the years of light,
When the last drop of water has run in the burn,
The last leaf fallen, the last bird flown,
When the rose is freed from the heart of the night
And the world is wound on the bobbin of time,
The dance will be still, the dance will be still,
The dance will be still on the wild hills.

JOHN SINGER

The Young Poets

Not this wild music in a breathless morning,
When all the world is cruel but adoring.
Saying, he babbles nonsense but is comely.
His words are childish, but his mouth's alluring.

Nor early singing with a summer heat,
Nor all the fabulous jewels of Verlaine.
No, no, not this alone, the light, the bud,
The plant, but the vision behind the pain.

Not arrogance alone, not even joy,
Not the undying kiss of innocence.
Nor the rapt heart, nor the unflinching head,
But battle and loss and humility's pence.

Humility's costly pence that buy a crust.
A crust of wisdom and a penny harp.
Humility's ancient ghost that sees and hears
When we water our masterpieces with our tears.

ALEX COMFORT

Concerning the Nature of Things

The heart of a whitened world
I lie by the sea that lies
like a green sheet on a bed
or else a limitless leaf
stirred by the fingers of rocks
and the island trees grow
and the sand deepens on the Spartan dead

who took their orders and died
holding a pass of beach
white as the single street
of a summer market town
between the cliff and the sea.

None was living to read
the epitaph or hear from Attic sailors

how the barbarians
sank as their planks sprang out
divers in green glass
and their drowned bubble-filled names
sparkle written in salt
and the dry tears of the sea.
Their weapons shone far down upon green sand.

Only Simonides
and the white, level voice
a polished bone of voice
small, the undulant thread
of a landfall sinking in time
at the stern of time as it goes
a rugged country sunk to a white thread:

unwritten unwritten
as the mourning bird's cry
for the things she has not known
but the loss of them is the stone in her heart
or as a standing ripple
in the pit between sky and land
are those who live only as songs or tales

unwritten unwritten
and the water at night moves
that once in a dream carried
on smooth hillsides, like
oval muscles which move
in a black arm reaching up
Danae in the jewelled chest

and the child in her arms suckled

So lampless, currentless, unmoved
asleep or frozen, many-faced
night of our time's soul, here
their living flames upright
mirrored burn and reburn
and run below our feet.

—Or of an older time
or of an older battle
the dead, the prisoners, the unmeasured evil
hangs in a ballad like a bubble in glass
and all these live only as songs or tales

—Andromache who once was married, given
in servitude, her stature and her face
shrunken by recollection, lies at night
thinking of walls and ships. Another time
the candle pattern shows her faces—now
the days like grains of sand silt features up

and he who is dead and all the rest who died
are worn away like coins or monuments
thinner, more featureless. They go that way
to an unresurrected vagueness with
their voices or their ways—unreachable darkness
covers their faces. Nothing is left to hold

but a white oval moving into time

Prisoners and widows know it, children know
Now has no meaning, only Then and Coming.
In the dark room of times and distances
Hector and she, two names, faceless in time:
a prisoner's bed, or footsteps coming, work,
days set alike like soldiers, one behind the other

where memory's unequal melting leaves
the hardest things behind. A hanging coat,
a cough, a finger, fossils. A pool of time
level as water running slowly out.
And justice will not know its way between
the dead and the murderers—all faceless, all tales,
    all ballads.

Midday in the island is
the sand of a green pool

the sun falls in a shaft
from a knothole in the door

the smoke of a fire runs
in a fold of wind, dust

yellow like small bees
is swarming without a sound

moving its gold net
dust is the key to it

multiform dusts, a sufficient answer.

In the fullness of time: all things
move to a centre, travel

by mile or inch, to reach
the effortless still Sargossa sea

the smooth shot of water, the sharp
anchors of metal, the soft

globes of oil, the dull
burrs of earth move

unbreakable ductile dusts
the motes in the knothole beam

being what they are, travel
like bees at sunset back

The smoke of the birch fire
a skein across a tree

where the sun draws bars on it
is the soul of the tree, white

impalpable similitude
grown out of tangible wood

something of finer gauge
than the grain of dusts or oils

but yet it casts a shadow.

From a dead man: from me
when I am burned, the same.

Something more subtle, fine
beyond the fineness of smoke

as shadowless as glass
an unthinkably light dust

too small to settle and cloud
water, the mourner's clothes

or like the motes of air
in which a mote of dust

hangs gross as a river stone—
the fine dust of my mind

the fine smoke of this thought.

The dust by which we know
that the immaterial Gods

have the still finer grain
of nothing, the shadow of smoke

the shadow of our shadow
a net without its cords.

So set at nought by dust
the gods and those they destroyed

who live as stories and songs
are level as a lake shore

are prints of ropes the waves kill on the sand.

For matter in its sleep
is troubled by such dreams

fear and the Absolute
Reward and Punishment

the dust that moves in the sun
is awake and laughs at both

on the fine smoke that goes
up from a pyre no judge

lays fetters, and he, unreal
Minos the shadow cast

by our dream, is a dream. No river
runs fire or wailing—all

dispersed in that same sleep
give up their dusts and move

anonymous and gone
like an army after war

each part to its own place
Hector, the sword, the wound

the Trojan woman's tears.
Inextricable, beyond punishment

or justice, or recognition,
the thief absconding into leaf and fish

all our tracks covered. Wrongs
die slowly out as tales

passed like a flame from flame to candle on.

This mid-day is no less
like a gold pool. I lie

at peace with matter, myself
being material

and holding in my hands
all justice that there is

and fear gone out like smoke
and the sun chasing the fear

even of the dreamless night.

DANNIE ABSE

Letter to Alex Comfort

Alex, perhaps a colour of which neither of us had dreamt
may appear in the test-tube, with God knows what admonition.
Ehrlich certainly was one who broke down the golden doors,
yet only after his six hundred and sixth attempt.

Koch also, painfully, and with true German thoroughness
eliminated the impossible, and proved that too many of us
are dying from the same disease. Yet was his wish,
like yours, directed to alleviate an international distress.

Still, I, myself, don't like Germans, but prefer the unkempt
voyagers, who, like butterflies drunk with suns,
can only totter crookedly in the dazed air
to reach charmingly their destination, as if by accident.

That Greek one then, is my hero, who watched the bath water
rise above his navel and rushed out naked, 'I found it,
I found it' into the street, in all his shining, and forgot
that others would only stare at his genitals. What laughter!

Or Newton, leaning in Woolsthorpe against the garden wall
forgot his indigestion and all such trivialities,
but gaped up at heaven in just surprise, and with
true gravity, witnessed the vertical apple fall.

O what a marvellous observation. Who would have reckoned
that such a pedestrian miracle could alter history,
that henceforward everyone must fall, whatever
their rank, at thirty-two feet per second, per second.

You too, I know, have waited for the doors to fly open, and
played
with your yo-yo of chemicals and written long letters
to the Press; told the truth unafraid, defied your betters, and dug
deep into the wriggling earth for a rainbow, with an honest spade.

But nothing rises. Neither spectres, nor oil, nor love.
And the old professor must think you mad, Alex, as you rehearse
poems in the laboratory like vows, and curse those clever scientists
who dissect away the wings, and the haggard heart from the dove.

KENNETH GEE

The Port

In spring the boats sailed from the quayside like flowers on the
water.
I went out with the seamen
and came back to anchor at the heart of winter.
Between the seasons was the frenzied sea, romantic enemy and
grave of realists:
And the ramshackle hours in the ports between landfall and
departure,
the when and where the iron of absence enters the soul.

After the homeless years, the vacant harrying waters,
I looked for peace in an old place,
If not a welcome: but only a wind I did not know
chilled different streets and filled them with booming darkness.

It was desolate: I wept for
the square empty, the café deserted by old friends;
A dead rose pressed on the window—
summer had passed by years ago, was at an end for good.
A broken down violinist
was playing variations on weariness and death.
No one was waiting for no one:
it was no good my looking for my love beside the ravaged tenements
or down bleak avenues where the wind howled the evening in.

Time doesn't stand still simply because the heart begs for its yesterdays.
Dusk came like zero, with blank snow falling.
Life's a disaster at a time like this and writes its hours in italics.
Man is the loneliest creature, on voyage or in his landfalled city.

I have expected this often since:
and vacant tables: on the veined marble plane
Someone is always writing down
in a desperate scrawl his account with suffering and pain.

Now I wandered with my brother sailors
by the gambler's nervous wheel and the crossbone dice:
I saw the twitching dry-leaf fingers, alcoholic tears,
a laugh like a wry grimace.
There was no joy or grief could stir those hearts one night or evernight. -
Other assassins had plunged their knives in long ago,
given the final twist and touched on stone.

The place closed dark and burning on me,—
Oh dusty little hell without original sin.

I groped for air,
for the clean snow like a problem in mathematics solved,
intuition or a plant.
Garrulous as the sea with drink,
telling my harrowing odyssey to the crumbling stones of the port,
I shambled through the vaults of the winter night.
The squalid houses stumbled with me to the water's brink
and in the harbour crashed.

I tumbled out of when and where to ground:
I would have slept, wrapped in a lull of snow;
  only I feared the night, sky:
  darkness: silence;
My terrible and haven-home sea sunken so far below
  I heard it no more.
The streets of the port receded, nothing beyond nothing:
  there was only snow.

Her hands were soiled and gentle when she came.

I do not know how she found me nor why
  let fall her pity on me.
We moved away together
  as if we had known one another long before
  and I had been waiting to be called for.
We walked on silently by the black marble of the sea.
Entering her mean place I had reached a haven.

Was she a sea-widow waiting at the edge of grief
  or a gay girl without anxiety,
  bearing love in an easy heart?—
I only wanted sleep
  and another human being by me in the deep dark,
  warm to my loneliness:

She lay beside me in her charity.

Down through the gentle night many promontories drowned.

In the bright morning
  the shabby room was calm and cleansed by pity.
Pale invading sunlight and the quivering sea
  touched inseparably in my memory forever
  her red blouse on a chair-back, high-heeled shoes;
And a vase of flowers miraculously found in winter.

And all at once the air outside was burning with gold birds—
Gulls with sunlight happy on the underside of their wings.

Beyond the window a town of snow
  hung between blue and blue,
On this morning that I turned away
  without a need to say goodbye.

And yet at last returned:

  behind me floats the pale blue and green of the winter sea.
That night's pure snow
  smudges the quay still, the beach where sand might be.
Children and gulls are crying by these waves that wash my caves
  of memory, and are here and now.

The drowned may be happy lying in their shivering kingdom
  by columns broken but elegant
  by shattered prows.
Green light hollows out the sea floor and
  oceanic movement is tiny and hardly stirs
  the muffed, storm-proof water.

An oak box sways, unsealed:
  the water gnaws the voyager's half-written journal,
  pages of failure through the years dissolved:
Youth is waiting in the margin forever:
  the handwriting is known by heart and has hardly changed—

I turn my back on all this: it is over.
Rock: sand: water; farewell,
  I should never have come back for another look, it is always
      too late.
And now to turn the other way, inland:

  nothing is finished, ever,

PETER JACKSON

Love and Death

Though death my oracle and the sun my book
my tongue touched with the same coal
or flame I would not dream the prophet's miracle

that gave conspiracy divinity and took
in quick return unwilling love, stole
bread from flesh and motive out of ecstasy:

though Babel's compromise in me should strive
or herald clocks stand by coldly to solemnize
each new denial I would not tell

the lover secreted in me how he shall live
by an old rule of godhead to compel
synecdoche of loving and death greeted.

GLORIA KOMAI

A Woman's Face

Eyes closed white flowers; how much of the world
Sinks, snow on snow?
Rose-skin mouth etched by kiss,
Toil, disillusion; kind now, waxen, cast
To passion's opposite;
engraved care (whose
Guilt?) softened by the milky bloom of sleep
(As sky so nearly luminous on edge
Of bodily pearl, almost morning);
if
Late love, moved, should breathe close, cry out, will be
Muffled dead by the snowy distances.

So far away, as if we also dreamed . . .

PETER YATES

Apologia

I

Only the challenge of difficult feats,
And the lithe strength which hunger taught
Still drive me through the whistling streets
And naked trees by Winter flayed,
Dreaming a new and flashing blade
To slit the dark bag of men's thought.

What matter if the nightmare pilgrimage
Should only strengthen my despair,
Whipping my intellectual rage
To fury at love's human lack,
And the persistent useless crack
Of mind's lash fraying in the air?

I hear the contented prisoners cry:
'Fool, fool! why waste your poet's skill
Pulling the eye-lid from the eye?
Others have been where you have been,
And from the scaffold of their spleen
Dangles the noose of nothing still.

'Think back: have you forgotten the corrupt
Sick face of war? nights when you heard
Streets splinter, and the wound erupt
Delirious fountains of blue gas—
Never the still-point of love's Mass
Or consummation of its Word?

'Reflect where all the brilliant madmen are
Who lost their balance asking how;
Guided by self-destruction's star
They climbed the tight-rope to enjoy—
Higher than body's jack-knife joy—
Unearthly kisses on the brow . . .

'Beware! sinister trap-doors to the Void
Open their yawning hatches when
The spirit's fury has destroyed
All venom in the serpent's hiss,
And wiped the imprint of Eve's kiss
Like lipstick from the cheeks of men . . .'

So let them scold, and warn me if they must.
I still shall make my gambler's throw.
A last sad shiver of disgust
May crack the mask on beauty's face,
And in contempt of death's embrace
Let the divine love-bruises show.

II

Seeking man's midnight through the city's nerves,
I go where baths of neon light
Exalt the bricks and spiral curves;
And where the whore and cultured rose
Mimic creation and repose,
Divorced from animal delight.

Only the unkempt beggars seem alive,
Tracing their hunger and unrest
In spittle through the civic hive,
Where each deformity of truth
Extracts God like a broken tooth,
And grins with techniperfect zest.

Yet still the gymnast flexing for new flights
Tests the old springboard of despair
To catapult him to those heights
Where genius hovers without strain;
And love's pure wisdom could maintain
A foothold in the yielding air.

And Venus aims; adjusts her sights again,
Knowing the trigger of love's joy
Will send her bullet through my brain,
And with the livid wound reveal
An ecstasy thought must not heal,
Nor will's tight bandages destroy.

Enjoy,' she calls; 'I am the living Art:
Only my April kissing tongue
Can hold the man-trap jaws apart,
Tuning the senses like a wire
To utmost tension of desire
As the unspoken word is sung . . .'

And so, set crooked on the broken plinth
Of thought's downfall, I watch again
The blond hair light the labyrinth;
And feel her lyrical command
Erect the tender human wand
To reach Creation's source of pain.

Poet,' she warns; 'what frenzy drives you on,
Circling the wrists I burn to give
With clumsy handcuffs of your song?
My joy alights like lightest bird,
And vocative without a word
Lights up the labyrinth to live . . .'

III

Enraptured once, and blinded by her gaze,
I walked in fever on the brink
Of final burning in that blaze;
Unlearning through love's mystery
What mind in quest of mastery
Taught my unthinking blood to think.

Yet who sustains the tension of that dance
Where the two bodies move as one,
Slipping thought's nooses in their trance?
For brick on brick mind throws up walls;
And envying the animals
We stare through gratings at the sun.

Like sprays the uncreative intervals
Syringe us with the city's grime,
Till no love-net can break the falls
Of mind's self-torture, or reprieve
Its dark compulsion to achieve
Perfection in man's human time.

And though no Lazarus can raise himself,
Mind's arrogance must still deny
The obscene mirror on the shelf;
And up and down the moving stair
Of exaltation and despair
Be drunken with the human lie.

Night after night, fleeing the cubic room,
I follow tram's antennae down
Wet streets that sparkle in the gloom,
While twilight's pure forgiving grace
Sponges the city's filthy face,
And sews the spangles on her gown.

And soon, like black umbrellas dripping light,
The bat-wing symbols of despair
Seduce me with their zig-zag flight,
Teaching my terror how to sing.
And use the sack of suffering
For balance on the foot-worn stair.

And when I see, scrawled on the paving-stone
The uncouth words for human love,
I think how they perhaps atone
Like ageless roots, unclenching fists
That pulse pure bird-song at the wrists,
And burst the stitching of mind's glove.

DEREK STANFORD

Poem to Commemorate the Eve of St. Swithin

Here, where the tufted churchyard drinks the light
of fat July in many a blue-veined beaker;
where the basking dead lie slung in their motionless
hammocks,
and the supplicating grave turns coarse and brown;

here, where noon's furnace rages; where the sun
snaps its bronze jaws about the steeple's stone;
where the alley, alone, is an aqueduct of shadow,
and the hanging clematis burns with a sledge-hammer blue;

here, too, where the stars are a host of platinum screws
scattered loose on an ebony tray from an inlaid box;
by the tomb where mysterious hands were gathering herbs,
by day or by night I meet you, intimate ghost.

Saint of the healing shower, the rites are paid.
The spires fade away like masts on a darkening sky.
The tongues of the air are uplifted in intercession,
and rain's grey garland gleams on the brows of day.

MURIEL SPARK

The Voice Of One Lost Sings Its Gain

This is the pain that sea anemones bear
in the fear of aberration, wilfully
aspiring to the first of a new breath,
and lifeward turning
flower into animal interminably.

It is the pain I move in and the best
of a woman is lost somewhere in me.
O pain, pain, pain,
I am never the one again to act and rest,
but answer to the least of another kind;
am here no more to savour nor desist,

but to identify the grains of sand
and call the anonymous grasses by their name,
to speak remembrance to the seabound streets;
when the tide enters the room, when the roof gives
flower,
cry Credo to the obdurate weed.

Suffer, my spirit, this pain and process,
nor look back to delight these eyes
that ache with the displacement of all sights.
I am here to alter the trunk of a tree to a dragon
that knows my mind, and the river to a swan.

LIONEL MONTEITH

Epithalamium

(for Lilian and John)

Early, the world was a garden.
Kingdoms grew then in the heart and mind
as the primrose adventurers plotted
their annual course
through the miraculous country
of a child spring.
Later, the flowers conjured no miracles,
and only nights offered the fabulous
probability of dreams.

But now the folds of fortune
have opened to the gold splendour
of August, and you who reach
to heaven for your fire
frame the word that spells
the world's end where the world ends
in love and love is your only word.

There, at the corner
of a continent where the green
earth lies aflame and the trees
sprout your message in another
language I, too, have explored
the phallic and the female symbols
of God—to find in their touch
that each is the eye of
heaven looking inwards
to the extreme potency of love.

And you, lovers, who came to question,
alone, the silence of your separate selves
have called from the sky a shout of joy
like the first cry of life. Have in changing
the world changed yourselves.

Now that you dedicate in the supreme
adventure of stars your final word
like a flame, like a cross, like the wing
of truth in a cloudy sky, I call
for the angel of adventurers to lead you to
where the rainbows end and the light that is
your quest is everywhere on the land.

SYDNEY SNELL

It is Written . . .

The Spirit of the Past
Has dragged me willy-nilly by the hair
Before a calcined mound.
I asked
'What has been burning there?
So brittle are those flakes an infant wind
These were your manuscrips of days and hours
Breathing upon them scatters them in dust.'

—Sorrow-filled pages with a little joy—
All that was written there has been recorded,
The soul of them no fires can destroy.

Birth-throes of powers crude and embryonic,
The soaring hope that fell with broken wing,
Even that last wild love when all your being
Was spent in giving.
Love calling love and answer there was none.

All this is entered in the great Archives
That so inexorably keep
The record of past lives.

T. A. R. HYNDMAN

Soldier to Poet

At the moment when we met
Died my right to stay alive.
You sang, my song ended.
Your road golden, roselined. Mine a
Treeless highway of whirling sands.

Hand in hand we climbed
Towards the unloving sun.
The hammering white-hot anvil's
Dance began the last waltz.
Death my dallier. My wallflower
Love waltzed with a rose.

I fell and larks ascended. Their
Song exposed the errors of my lips,
My hands. Mocked these staring, silly,
Simple loving eyes. Can you, alive,
Forget? Try to reach the moon again.
Try. My icy bones will make
Your hair and fingers freeze.

THE HUMAN RECORD OF STEPHEN SPENDER

The American Trappist poet, Thomas Merton, has written in his autobiography the words: 'Our weakness should not terrify us: it is the source of our strength'. How true is this remark when applied to the poetry of Stephen Spender! He wrote in a foreword to *The Still Centre*: 'A poet can only write about what is true to his own experience, not about what he would like to be true to his experience'. This was then his excuse for turning back to a kind of writing that was more personal and for including among his subjects weakness and fantasy and illusion. Later in his war-time book, *Life and the Poet*, he claimed that to be true to external nature a poet must first of all be true to his own nature. He must write about what really interests him. 'He must have, above all else, the courage to be himself'.

This sincerity has all along been Spender's greatest virtue as a poet. It explains too why he has always been more popular with those people who appreciate genuineness in poetry than with others to whom poetry *does not really exist*, who will admire always the latest claptrap, the latest obscurity, the latest jumping-jack out of the box whether it be apocalypse, neo-romanticism, personalism, anarchism, regionalism, existentialism, ruffianism, or the present escapist habit of writing dull little poems about places as if the poem was a substitute for the picture postcard. It explains why Spender has always been popular with the young who remain sincere until corrupted. I remember during the war reading a poem to Stephen Spender by Timothy Corsellis, a young airman who was killed at the age of twenty. He had expected to meet the usual, confident, egotistic and successful literary figure. Instead he records: 'You were more sensitive than sure'. He continued:

> *Perhaps this man is more the poet than philosopher,*
> *Perhaps there is more music than I know in his words.*

And when he went away it was with sympathy: 'Now I see you much as I am'.

Critics may scoff at a poet who appeals so strongly to adolescents or to the young or to the young in heart, but the fact had better be faced that very few people continue to read poetry after a certain age, after they have left their universities or have 'sold out' to their jobs or positions in the modern world. Thus a poet who has not got this ever-changing public among his readers has very few readers at all. That is why over-intellectual poetry and

the poetry of the crazy and of the dull has quite rightly very few readers at all, whatever the force of editors and critics trying to push it. . . .

In *The Edge of Being* there is a poem entitled *On the Third Day* which would appear to trace symbolically Spender's development as a poet. To the reader it would show the distance between two peaks almost, his first book and his latest, and the journey to get from one to the other. For both these books represent the peaks of Spender's emotional awareness, whereas the books in between are more concerned with progress through life or with observed awareness. Youth Spender found marvellous and in his first book wrote the poems that suited it. ('I lay in the valley . . .') Later conscience took a hand and in forcing him from his more natural development into politics made him less of a good poet. ('I climbed through the forest . . .') Finally, he records:

> *On the third summer day I sprang from the forest*
> *Into the wonder of a white snow-tide.*

And he goes on:

> *Every burden fell from me, I threw the forest from my back,*
> *The valley dwindled to a human world departed,*
> *Torn to shreds by clouds of the sun's shifting visions.*

His poetry has become as natural now as it was in the early *Poems*, 'a violin when the tune forgets the instrument', and beyond this it can become still greater because he has had the benefit of so much experience. It has always tended to be Spender's view that the past, present, and future are one; this view has enabled him now to dispense with all present disturbances as being ephemeral, and with the feeling that the poet must help physically to put right the wrongs of the world. He does not deny that there is much wrong with the world, but he makes it clear that the poet is a recorder and cannot help save by the spiritual weapon of love. Spender has thus moved right away from the political or practical sphere; he is at last working far above it and fulfilling the proper function of a poet.

Going back now to the beginning. It is doubtful whether this century will see again as fine or as wonderful a first book as Stephen Spender's *Poems*. It earns this praise, which the tough or the scholarly may jib at in favour of their own choices, because it represents in fact the most innocent and clear vision of

the poet, because it is the direct vision of the boy or young man who has let nothing sully it, who is not ashamed of any weakness or desire.

Never being but always at the edge of Being
My head, like Death-mask, is brought into the sun.

So begins one poem, and it is no accident that when fifteen years later Spender's mind and spirit should have reached to the same point of natural perception that his senses already knew he should have taken a title from this first book. Then his body told him:

Only my body is real: which wolves
Are free to oppress and gnaw.

I claim fulfilment in the fact of loving.

I must have love enough to run a factory on,
Or give a city power, or drive a tram.

Now 'love' is a word that is used over frequently by many young poets, but when Spender used it he quite definitely meant his love for some other individual or individuals and through that love his love for all others of the human race generally. There is no sense in trying to disguise this, in trying to figure out some philosophical concept for it, else one must write in riddles. There is no harm critically or morally in being in love and writing about it; and if one is so weak as to be infatuated, it is only honest to say so. And the reader, looking back from a period that has become much emptier at his own early passions, can be thankful that there exists a poet who could write so well and who experienced similar infatuations and has fixed them in time for him.

Here are
Gestures indelible. The wiry copper hair
And the mothlike lips at dusk and that human
Glance, which makes the sun forgotten.

Or in the poem beginning: 'How strangely the sun reminds me of my love!'.

What is left of that smoke which the wind blew away?
I corrupted his confidence and his sunlike happiness
So that even now in his turning of bolts or driving a machine
His hand will show error. That is for him.
For me this memory which now I behold,
When, from the pasturage, azure rounds me in rings
And the lark ascends, and his voice still rings, still rings.

From a love or affection towards the particular Spender soon passed to a love or affection for the general, which was the idealistic root of his brief spell of communism and of his emergence into politics, a phase of his life which he later admitted to be a mistake in *Life and the Poet*. As it is, the best of his political poems appear to be inspired more by friendship, by what the Romans would have called 'a little love', than by Marxism. There was something romantic rather than mystical in the word 'comrade'.

Oh comrades, step beautifully from the solid wall
advance to rebuild and sleep with friend on hill
advance to rebel and remember what you have
no ghost ever had, immured in his hall.

Communist politics for a time represented a brave new world for Spender and because he felt it to be based upon love and affection he went out of his way to write purely political poems like *Vienna* in aid of it. He found, however, that there was much pettiness and restriction and misrepresentation.

And indeed, in *Returning to Vienna* in *The Edge of Being* he recalls his early mistake and sets out to correct it. 'What was real', he now finds, 'was transitory dust', the ever-renewing dust of history, and so the Vienna story has at last come to represent to him:

A senseless lightless voiceless theatre
Where the ghosts play at being ghosts.

And that is why, apart from the love poems, the best pieces among Spender's early work tend to be purely descriptive, like the air-liner coming into the aerodrome:

More beautiful and soft than any moth

or else expressive of a whole-hearted admiration for the past where the great legendary figures are brought close to you, like ghosts that are near you and whom you can recognize instinctively and only for a moment in other people, as in that tale of Diaghilev wandering in the rain around Trafalgar Square and suddenly seeing for a moment in a male prostitute a vision of the young Nijinski. From such an emotion came the thundering lines of: 'I think continually of those who were truly great'.

Some critics have professed to find an unpleasantness in the early work of Spender, which they explain by remarking upon the cruel simile or the frank description of ugliness. Thus Van der Lubbe's laughter is:

like justice, twisted by a howitzer

and in *The Port*

the pale lily boys flaunt their bright lips
Such pretty cups for money.

Yet it is unreasonable to suggest that such passages as these are a fault and I think that what is really making these critics uncomfortable is Spender's emotional honesty, a virtue only too rarely appreciated by those who are themselves lacking in self-knowledge.

In so far as Spender, in common with other poets of the 'thirties, prophesied in his writing the approaching war, I think that he foresaw it largely as a holocaust for the young which they or some of them must somehow survive. He pitied their plight but knew it to be inevitable. Thus in *Trial of a Judge,* Petra's fiancé cries:

All we need is love. And yet we play
The meaningless game of a machine
Running in grooves laid down by death.

But Petra's brother, after the murder of Petra, exclaims:

Their leaden bullets against a knife-edge
Of steel have tried to turn the blade:
But instantly when he died, the entire knife
Of what he thought and strove, glued to my hand.

As a political play *Trial of a Judge* has, of course, dated; but because there is this idea of constant regeneration and continu-

ance in it, an idea which becomes much stronger in the later Spender, it often remains strikingly apposite to a changed situation, particularly in speeches like that of the Judge, commencing 'Dear friend, your world is the antipodes' and containing the lines:

Yet all will the same; only
Those who are now oppressed will be the oppressors,
The oppressors the oppressed.

The Still Centre, Spender's second volume of poetry, contains several poems that he wrote during the Spanish War, in which he took a small part. His enemies have reproached him with the fact that he never did any actual fighting in this war; but as his poetry claims no such heroic record these remarks fail to pass as criticism. The poems are in fact completely honest. A mere propagandist would not have found that common suffering made the two armies one:

As though these enemies slept in each other's arms.

Nor would a belligerent poet have found such sympathy for *The Coward* as to say:

I gather all my life and pour
Out its love and comfort here.
To populate his loneliness,
And to bring his ghost release,
My love and pity shall not cease
For a lifetime at least.

If indeed 'love' and 'pity' are the only two gifts that Spender brought to the Spanish War—and he has never anywhere claimed anything else—one cannot help feeling, looking back, that these were perhaps of greater worth than the propaganda of lesser poets and of more permanent value to humanity than all that might have been done by the righteous or by those whose lovely philosophy was expressed in action. There were plenty of people ready to shoot, both with bullets and words, at the young Spaniard on either side, but it is well for literature that there was someone who could look on and regard this Spaniard, whatever his politics, as a human being, whose death—apart from other considerations—must leave an empty space in another's

heart. That, after all, was the poet's proper task.

The guns spell money's ultimate reason
In letters of lead on the spring hillside.
But the boy lying under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss.

The remaining poems in *The Still Centre* continue a little further with that personal self-searching which has always been typical of Spender's poetry. In *Variations on My Life,* Spender saw both a going forward and a going back as two alternatives he might take. The First Variation with its dream of potential greatness would appear to promise everything, making the poet one with all those legendary heroes of the past, even though it meant accepting:

My own weakness beyond dispute
Which is the strength I reject.

On the other hand he could avoid the issue and return to a state of being very similar to that which produced his first poems. Spender is honest enough to admit that this return would be the sweeter and pleasanter alternative if it could be accomplished, but of course it is impossible. One can no longer in life return in this way 'to the first loved friend' and even should a substitute be found the same quarrels and disturbances are inevitable and for the same reasons of character. Going back is a pleasant dream, but it can never be accomplished.

It is a similar state of mind that partly explains the embarrassing poems in *Ruins and Visions* relating to Spender's separation from his first wife, Inez. By 'embarrassing' I do not mean that these are bad poems or that they should not have been written—they are in fact much better poetry than the poems written to Inez before the separation; it is, however, certain that any less honest writer would have found these poems peculiarly embarassing to write and publish. Frequently they have a gentle, almost mocking quality.

Her happy happy perfidy
Was justified was justified
Since compulsive needs of sense
Clamour to be satisfied . . .

But in others like *The Double Shame* he cannot resist dramatizing his experience vividly and emotionally, so as to give an impression that he can only write well about his loves when they are unhappy or sad. One recollects then that even those early poems to T.A.R.H. or others appear to be emotions recollected at the period of sadness or departure. . . .

Ruins and Visions, as its title suggests, also contains poems inspired by or having a bearing on the Second World War. As with the Spanish War poems there are no propaganda themes but once again a disturbing quality calculated to upset the over-intellectual. This is because they are emotive poetry of a high order, in which a pity which is not so much intellectual as emotional strikes the predominating note

Driven by intolerance and volted with lies
We melt down the whirring bodies of boys . . .

and so the fine, feather-head and laughing lads of our imaginations are clothed in the poet's words as well as filled with swear-words and soothed by the hands of their girls. There is the same sorrow for *The Drowned* with their last memories of the cities represented for them by the 'Kate and Mary' of the particular port. And seeing this holocaust of the young the poet feels no false or ranting patriotism but the doubt:

That it was all wrong from the start:
Victory and defeat both the same,
Hollow masks worn by shame
Over the questions of the heart.

Spender has been criticized in some quarters for identifying in one poem Poets and Airmen; and yet the poet who is living honestly as a poet and performing his own acts of intellectual and emotive courage may well compare in his loneliness and individuality with the physical and lonely bravery of the airman. The two positions are the same, only on parallel lines to one another, and that is why this poem *To Poets and Airmen* does clearly sum up Spender's attitude to a world at war and explains why he has a voice that should be heard.

Significantly, in the later stages of this book Spender shows that he has finished with politics and has begun to find his own substitute philosophy, which is fatalist and involves regeneration and repetition. Each day is a link in the chain, each moment must be made use of as well as it can be, but now it is for the

owner of the moment to make his own most personal decision, unaffected by purely temporary doctrine and realities.

With this in mind *Poems of Dedication* becomes in the poet's development a halting place or a marking of time. Unfortunately the excess of praise given to this book by the Georgians or Neo-Georgians (who still dominate the majority of the weekly critical press) and who noticed with glee that the poems rhymed, scanned, were easily understood, and appeared for once to be on safe subjects, set up a corresponding reaction of disappointment among the poet's sincerer followers who felt that he might be selling out from the avant-garde. In fact, however, this volume contained mainly occasional poems, as the title made sufficiently clear. Of these the first six pieces, constituting an Elegy to the memory of Margaret Spender are the best, reminding of the past in phrases like:

Yet those we lose, we learn
With singleness to love . . .

but also containing Spender's individual quality of emotional limpidity in a somewhat stricter form.

Orpheus, maker of music,
Clasped his pale bride
Upon that terrible river
Of the ghosts who have died . . .

The most important section of the book, however, is that called *Spiritual Explorations*, for here at last is expressed Spender's philosophy in its complete form, on which it is to be supposed he will base future work, as indeed he does so finely in *The Edge of Being*.

We are not worlds, no, nor infinity,
We have no claims on stone, except to prove
In the invention of the human city
Our selves, our breath, our death, our love.

That of course takes in much of what has already been written, but now the whole idea is clarified and made simple. The individual has come to be regarded as a person in a unique position to the past and the future in that his present comprises both these prospects. Just as the son repeats the father, so the father contains the son. Any one person's life is but a moment in this

chain of constant regeneration. What therefore the individual should strive for is not to seek some great temporal change which will never in any case come about from his efforts, but to find perfection in himself.

The immortal spirit is that single ghost
Of all time, incarnate in one time,
Which through our breathing skeletons must climb
To be within our supple skin engrossed.
Without that ghost within, our lives are lost
Fragments, haunting the earth's rim.

Let the boy back from the war first be shown what he is, then what he should do or feel.

Show him his body and what winged steed
Fulfilments of your grace and his grace need.

And later:

Show him the words that bleed
Out of the past and through the present
To the future of his heirs-apparant
Words and Pegasus he must guide
For generation of his generation to ride.

Finally, referring once more to this perpetual and universal spirit:

O be your truth transparent
Make his hands burn with your burning roses.

Critics who deplore Spender's gradual departure from the politics of the left may claim that this new approach of his is little more than a philosophical conservatism; but, while admitting that there is a grain of truth in this, it is wrong to judge it politically at all. Spender would seem to have found that the poet's job is to be a poet and not anything else, and that therefore a sense of humanity, a fatalistic view of history, and a long view of human life are now the requisites. Purely temporary themes are to be jettisoned unless they have a definite place in historical incidence or in human existence of the present. In this sense then it may be said that Spender is aiming at 'Naturalness', or poetry concerned with humanity and the permanent emotions.

The foregoing is all reflected in the poems that comprise *The Edge of Being*. Indeed many of these give the impression of being perfected works of emotive art based on the foundation of a strong philosophical idea. Technically there are once again the limpidity of vision and the appeal to the senses that were in the early work, but there is also a greater restraint, a more controlled and more striking rhythm. From the human point of view the book also contains the first good poems arising from actual happiness in love rather than from loneliness, absence, or disappointment. Lines like:

> *O night*
> *When my mouth was a vague animal cry*
> *Pasturing on her flesh*

are at once vivid and real and in a new way of sensuousness for Spender. Similarly his new power is strong enough to allow him to make dangerous excursions, rescuing words and imagery that other poets might have regarded as doomed perpetually to the lumber-room that the prejudice of one age creates for the coloured artifice of another. How like Flecker, for instance, but with Spender added is the end of *Faust's Song*:

> *To wake on peaks at dawn among the inhuman*
> *Rose-towering dreams—O peacocks, fountains, sighs—*
> *Reborn in the blonde landscape of a woman*
> *And dying in the river of her eyes!*

In *Returning to Vienna* he has re-written the *Vienna* poem replacing crudity with compassion and politics with love. *Judas Iscariot* is a strong, sensitive religious poem, stating the case once more for the traitor, the weak man as against the Master with his divine strength and foreknowledge. Elsewhere, even in slight pieces like *Word* Spender reveals a deftness of touch which is refreshing.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to think of *The Edge of Being* as a collection of single pieces rather than as a composite whole. For the new Spender philosophy, in which 'each is involved in the tears and blood of all' envelopes most of these poems. It is at the core, for instance, of a lyrical war poem like *Weep, Girl, Weep* as well as supplying the basis for that more rhetorical piece in which the poet, considering the responsibility of the British pilots for the destruction of Germany in the spring of 1945 takes their guilt upon himself. In *The Conscript* this idea

of mutual suffering together with life's repetition is so strong that a forced and untrue propaganda poem has ironically been produced. The conscript of World War II may have accepted the holocaust for himself and for *his* generation, but it was certainly not with a cry of 'Father! Father! I come!' after the ghosts of the fighters at Mons . . .

What, however, Spender meant to indicate is explained more fully in the long poem *Speaking to the Dead in the Language of the Dead* and in lines like:

> *Perhaps we live in time as on a plain*
> *Where our life is the blurred and jagged edge*
> *Of all who ever died.*

And so, when we in our turn shall have become among the dead our life will similarly exist as an example for the next generation to follow. The idea is perfectly followed up in the lyric beginning:

> *We cannot hold onto the world*
> *However much we would*
> *We stand on a turning wheel and are hurled*
> *Beyond evil and good.*

Meanwhile and for the present man's Now is the 'irreducible secret diamond' of 'Time in our Time', which acts as a pivot between man's two profiles facing Past and Future. And so the book ends, restating in clear terms one man's human and natural behaviour.

> *Oh, though the Past dissolve, may all that was*
> *Once idea integrated into stone*
> *Enter my secret mind at the whirling centre*
> *Of the external storm: and combine with*
> *A love which penetrates through falling flesh*
> *To paint the image in my heart*
> *Of that past greatness and that once-willed Future,*
> *Beyond the storm, which still can make a world.*

The poet's personality has become intransigent for the good; there are no ephemeral complications; living is nearly Being.

JOHN WALLER.

ON SPOKEN AND WRITTEN POETRY

THE average reader, if asked what the word 'poetry' conveyed to him, would probably stumble upon some more or less adequate definition. But before any definition was attempted, it is almost certain that he would conjure up a mental image of 'poetry' as he had come to know it on the printed page. In other words, he would think first and foremost of the *look* of poetry: only when seeking words to describe it would rhythm and rhyme cause him to think of it in terms of sound. After five hundred years of conditioning by the printed page, this is perhaps inevitable. But it is well to remember that five hundred years is a very small span in the history of poetic composition.

Even as late as classical times, poetry still implied an oral performance. To the Greek or Roman, a poem was something to be heard—whether declaimed at a public festival or recited at a private banquet. What is more, whether the poem were epic, dramatic or lyric—music played an essential part in its performance. Indeed, a sense of pitch is no less essential to a proper appreciation of classical verse than a sense of quantity. As for the mediæval lyric—the art of the troubadour and the trouvere—it is impossible even to consider it without reference to its obviously musical structure.

Strictly speaking, poetry should not be confused with 'literature' at all. Literature is the product of letters, and letters come only with the practice of writing. But poetry antedates the practice of writing by many thousand years: poetry was old before writing or letters or literature were ever conceived.

Despite this fact—as the Chadwicks have pointed out—there is no word in the language for the pre-literate compositions of even our own heroic age! To talk about 'oral literature' is to employ a plain contradiction in terms: one might as well talk about 'audible silence'.

Heroic or otherwise, it was quite a long time before poetry was committed to writing—even after the writing habit had become widespread. Poems were first written down, in fact, simply with a view to preserving the proper order of the words—in the same way that we now write down a musical score to preserve the proper order of the notes. But the first written poems were no more intended for silent reading than the modern score is intended for silent study. Music requires to be heard: it is more than merely an imagined sound inside the reader's head. The same should be true of poetry.

The habit of reading poetry with the eye and imagining its cadences in the mind rather than reproducing them audibly with the voice is both recent and unfortunate. For poetry continued to be spoken long after it first began to circulate in manuscript. It was only with the invention of printing that silent reading became a habit and poetry—for the first time—began to lose its voice. Printed books were soon more common than speakers of poetry. Printing, in fact, had created its own particular poetry. Before very long it had succeeded in doing what the copyist had never done before: it had killed the art of the minstrel.

By the end of the sixteenth century—within a hundred years of Caxton—minstrelsy in Britain had degenerated into the public hawking of broadsheet ballads. The minstrel had lost the ear of cultured society: he had been forced down into a poor dependence upon the illiterate. His art, which had grown up under the patronage of kings, was ending its days in the gutter. Yet crude and feeble as many of his wares became, we must not forget that it was mainly in his broadsheets that the tradition of spoken poetry persisted for over two hundred years.

There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between poetry meant for the eye to read and poetry meant for the ear to hear—so much so that but for the invention of printing, the whole nature of modern European poetry would have been different. It would have remained more emotional in its appeal and become less intellectualized. Narrative poetry would have continued to occupy first place in popular esteem. Simile would not have been ousted so completely by imagery. Dramatic poetry as we know it to-day would never have come into being. Most important of all, perhaps, music and lyric poetry would never have grown up as separate, unrelated arts.

In the case of English poetry—to look no further—it is easy to see how the sudden spread of the reading habit completely changed the nature and genius of poetic composition. It is certainly no coincidence that Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde should have been followed so promptly by a so-called 'reform' of English poetry at the hands of Wyatt and Surrey. The eye which had begun to read its poetry off the printed page demanded smoothness of verse no less than legibility of type. And just as Blackletter had disappeared, so disappeared many of the most striking features of British spoken poetry. For the reading eye demanded that its poetry should not be complicated by any idiosyncracies of rhythm which tended to trip the inexperienced reader at the first encounter. The sprung rhythm of the allitera-

tive long line was the first casualty of all: that died even at the hands of the copyists. Dactyls and anapaests quickly followed it. The iamb became the norm of English metric: stress gave way completely to accent. Regularity in metre and predictability in rhythm became the order of the day—for these were what the inexperienced reading eye demanded. Given these, it was prepared to accept an increasing degree of bookishness, and—finally—ambiguity.

The reason for this is obvious. The reading eye was prepared to read, re-read and re-read again, until the last fine shade of meaning surrendered to the assault. It was prepared cheerfully to accept the principle, amid its pausings and puzzlings, that a poem was merely a collection of parts. Under its influence, poetry ceased to be uninterrupted progression from a beginning to an end—in short, a significant pattern of sound. For the reading eye, the pattern was something to see on the printed page. Sound, on the other hand, had vanished into the silent depths of the reading mind. Only significance remained—and that the eye and its mind were ready to find by diligent searching. Indeed, by the end of a hundred years of printed poetry, the search had become an essential part of poetic appreciation.

This is not to say that the tradition of written poetry *per se* is a bad tradition, or that the tradition of spoken poetry is in any way a better one. The two traditions should obviously exist side by side. All one can fairly complain of is that the written, literary tradition should have eclipsed the earlier forms so completely as to have killed appreciation of all that had gone before. The poetry of Wyatt and Surrey succeeded by virtue of its inherent excellence: we can only regret that it should have destroyed a tradition that had given us *Piers Plowman*, the Ballads, Dunbar and Skelton. As it transpired—by Spenser's time, Chaucer himself had virtually ceased to be read. The melody of his poetry was lost to the ear when the eye first failed to appreciate his use of the final E. If Chaucer had continued to be read aloud, the principle of his scansion could never have been forgotten—as it was—until the days of Tyrwhitt.

We have suggested that the invention of printing brought about the so-called reform of English verse: it is probably no less responsible for the sixteenth-century revival of the drama—and the particular form it took. Denied his wonted audience in one field, the poet could be expected to look for it in another—as the public could be expected to provide it. In the Middle Ages the poet had been content to leave the drama to lesser men, though

Everyman and one or two of the other Interludes and Miracle Plays had shown a considerable art. But it was unfortunate that major poets took up the drama only after they had themselves been conditioned by the written poetry conventions. *Gammer Gurton* must then give way to *Gorboduc,* for nothing less than a 'literary' drama would satisfy the literary critic—as witness Sir Philip Sidney's remarks on the subject. Accordingly, with Lyly, Marlowe, Greene and Peele, a literary drama was brought into the theatre. Even Shakespeare himself turned out the literary plays which the theatre demanded—rather than the plays he would have written a century earlier.

In point of fact, the poetry of the Elizabethan stage is not a poetry which stems from any earlier spoken tradition. It is written' poetry intended to be heard by a specially conditioned audience—the literary audience of the Court and Universities. Such an audience, and such poetry, had very little in common with the unliterary man of the people. The man of the people might still appreciate *Chevy Chace* or *Greensleeves,* but so far as the Elizabethan stage was concerned, he was no more than a convenient figure of fun. As such we see him caricatured in satirical plays like *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.*

In short, the Elizabethan theatre played primarily to an audience of readers: it did not play essentially to an audience of listeners. Its poetry was all too often the poetry of literature and rhetoric: it was all too seldom a poetry which drew its rhythms or its phrasing from the speech of everyday life. Only in the later plays of Shakespeare and the Jacobeans do we find genuine speech-rhythms breaking up the smooth run of the iambics. Only in the decay of 'literary' drama do we find a few faint echoes of the flexibility which had once been the chief attraction of English spoken verse. But by that late date, of course, the theatres were just about ready to close. When they re-opened, the poetic drama was virtually dead.

It is not to the theatre, in fact, that we must look for the first revival of spoken verse forms such as had been popular in the hey-day of the Middle Ages. Such a revival was to come only with the publication in 1765 of Bishop Percy's famous *Reliques.* The sudden impact upon a literary public of such vigorously unliterary poetry as the *Reliques* represented was enough to leave the heart of even the eighteenth century moved more than with a trumpet. It was also enough to induce Chatterton, Cowper and Blake to attempt reform of the whole debased art of 'literary' poetry. It prepared universal acclaim for the poetry of a new

makar in the person of Robert Burns—in whose less 'literary' North the tradition of spoken poetry had never wholly succumbed. Finally, it enabled Wordsworth and Coleridge to launch their *Lyrical Ballads* and defend them in a preface which said many things related to the point at issue—without their ever being quite aware of what that point entailed.

It was unfortunate that the public which accepted *Lyrical Ballads* was still, perforce, a reading public. The printing press having still no rival to contend with, this was obviously inevitable. But the Romantic Revival might well have proved far other than it did if broadcasting had arrived a century before its time. As it was, the movement which had begun auspiciously with *Lyrical Ballads* was very shortly taken up with metaphysical fancies which may have been Romantic, but which certainly had nothing to do with the everyday speech and the everyday scenes discussed in Wordsworth's preface.

The same inevitable dependence upon a reading public and a reading tradition was subsequently to defeat every nineteenth-century attempt to bring back poetry into some relation to the spoken word. Even Browning, whose work most benefits by speaking, was sadly hampered by the written conventions of his time. His work, while eminently speakable, is not always so eminently understandable—at least, not without careful study. At its very worst, it might be said to represent a slangy form of metaphysical journalism.

Spoken poetry, if it is to succeed at all, will succeed by reason of three factors, all of which had been sadly neglected in the evolving of a written poetic style. Spoken poetry calls above all else for simplicity, an understanding of speech rhythms and the quality of immediacy.

Needless to say, immediacy is the most important of the three and largely presupposes the other two. A written poem can be analysed at leisure. It can be studied until it is finally comprehended in much the same way as a problem in mathematics. But only *after* it has been comprehended can it be assessed as poetry. During the process of comprehension, written poetry—*as* poetry—ceases to exist. The reading is interrupted, the poem broken in pieces, the rhythm and continuity of sound completely ignored. Like a dismantled machine, it has ceased to exist as itself, and become a collection of individually assessed spare parts. After the assessing and the comprehension is complete, the parts can once more be reassembled—and from that time on they can be appreciated as poetry, since comprehension can be

brought ready-made to the reading. But the essential prerequisite of spoken poetry is that it should be *immediately* comprehensible on its first hearing—a hearing that will be uninterrupted. The impact on the listener of the mood and meaning of the poem must be as instantaneous as the impact of the rhythm.

We have seen that earlier attempts to re-popularize the conventions of spoken poetry died for want of a reachable listening audience. Now, needless to add, radio has supplied that want. The listening audience for poetry is already infinitely greater than the reading audience has ever been. What effect, then, is the increasing habit of radio listening likely to have upon poetic composition? It is surely reasonable to assume that its effect will be no less than that produced by the invention of printing. And if that is the case, may not the conventions of poetry as we know them to-day be utterly changed by the end of the century? Oddly enough, though radio has already been with us for thirty years, Professor I. A. Richards appears to be the only critic who has considered the possibility. A literary tradition, like any other, would seem to die hard!

At present, understandably, the majority of the poetry broadcast is poetry written originally for publication. Much of it is reasonably suitable for broadcasting; some if it is even direct and immediate in its appeal. But for the most part, broadcast poetry is a poetry which depends for its appreciation upon a previous familiartiy with the text. With a literary minority-audience, such familiarity may be assumed. It may also be assumed that puzzled listeners may occasionally revert to their book-shelves. But appreciation of broadcast poetry on these terms is likely to decrease rather than grow: there are too many alternative diversions.

Obviously enough, if broadcast poetry is to succeed in winning and holding its potential audience, it must succeed by reason of its suitability to the medium. It must succeed, as spoken poetry originally did, by its immediate impact on the listener in a first and probably only hearing. It must rely for its effect upon no previous knowledge or subsequent study. It must be poetry very different from that dear to the literary reviews: it must be poetry written after an earlier pattern.

After all, radio already commands a listening audience which utterly dwarfs any public reached by printed publication. The publisher of poetry talks in terms of thousands where the radio producer talks in terms of millions. And before much longer, the poet with something urgent to say will begin to think first of

the larger audience. After all, there is nothing to prevent his following up a broadcast performance of his work by publication of a printed text. If only for want of a recording (which will ultimately meet their needs) many of his listeners will be glad to have his work in print for subsequent enjoyment. And having heard the work performed in the first place, they may even be able to read it correctly for themselves—aloud.

Although the reasons have never been clearly stated, we can already trace the effect of radio upon contemporary poetic style. The re-conditioning process, in fact, has already begun—though it is still very largely unconscious. In the dramatic work of Christopher Fry, Ronald Duncan and Donagh McDonagh the influence is clear enough. Many poets, such as Archibald MacLeish, Louis MacNeice, Laurie Lee, Terence Tiller, Henry Reed and others, have taken to radio as to a new dramatic medium. And though the influence of the spoken radio tradition upon lyric and narrative poetry is not yet quite so obvious, the influence will be discernible before much longer.

The question of radio production, needless to say, is far too wide for consideration here. It must suffice to point out that unless the poet is to be concerned personally with the production of his work at the microphone—which he rarely can be—some means will have to be evolved for making his intentions clear to the producers and actors who are. It is an astonishing comment on the indifference which printed publication has induced in the poet as to how (or whether) his work is to be heard, that no system of speech notation has ever been devised. No composer would dream of publishing a musical score without the clearest indications on it as to how the notes were intended to be played. Yet the stress marks which Gerard Manley Hopkins introduced into his manuscripts are probably the only instance of an attempt by a poet to inform the eye—and so assist the interpretation—of his reader.

So long as the reader is only preoccupied with the *sense* of poetry, he may not even be convinced that any such guide is necessary. He will continue to impose his own rhythms, to impose his own inflections and to rely upon his own varying sense of timing and phrasing. The result, as he hears it in his head, may be adequate—but it is unlikely to approximate very closely to the intentions of the author. Indeed, to judge by the almost complete inability of many inveterate readers to *speak* poetry well, it is far more likely to provide a hideous travesty. Perhaps that is one good reason why so little poetry is read aloud in the home. . . .

Yet the proper speaking of poetry is an art far less difficult to acquire than the art of playing the piano. And until the art has been acquired—by poets no less than by their public—neither will probably be conscious of any loss. How great the loss is to both can probably only be understood by someone trained to use his voice— or help other people to use their's.

But it is no less true to-day than ever that the essence of rhythm and the essense of poetry is audible *sound*. Until we have all of us grown accustomed once again to speaking and hearing poetry, we will never be able to appreciate it to the full. Conversely, until poetry has rediscovered the qualities of simplicity and immediacy, it will never be heard. And unless it begins once more to be heard—as the habit of reading gives way to the habit of listening—poetry will cease to exist.

D. G. BRIDSON

THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

THE arc lights of the reading public's attention are now once more directed on what men who are now old know as the most inspiring period in English literature and even the literature of Europe, the Romantic. The American Pound-Eliot monopoly had thrust it into the darkness of oblivion since 1922. To utter the name of Shelley or Byron between the wars was to be looked at as if one was destitute of cheap intelligence, a moron outcast from the cliques. Recently, the swing of the pendulum has made itself felt. Revival of interest in the Romantic poets has shown itself in the flow of books, editions, selections, lives, letters, memoirs of the despised Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and, in the tradition, Rossetti, Ruskin, and Yeats the last and perhaps one of the greatest of them all.

Mr. Harold Nicholson has heralded *The Last Attachment* by Iris Origo as the most satisfying book he has seen for twenty years. It could not come at a better moment after reprints of *Don Juan* and Mr. Roy Fuller's selection. It is a long book, mostly letters introduced with the very inteligent commentary of the Marchesa Origo. It is probable that nobody has evoked the real

world of Byron's life as she has. How different it is to the usual conception of the conceited debauchee of Venice rehabilitating himself by a glorious death fighting for liberty in Greece. Though it is true Byron was very much engaged with the Carbonari in Italy and when abortive revolutions became dangerous those liable to arrest were always glad to dump their arms in his cellar, his flight from the nauseating monotony of female routine was not, as is usually thought, to Greece, but to the British colonies of the Ionian islands, reached after a delectable cruise, and ending in many months of pleasant hunting and drinking with the English garrison. The last tragic phase at Missolonghi was something of an anti-climax. Even the Turkish officers of the blockading fleet must have seemed more like English gentlemen than the fantastic Greek rabble to whom Byron was a source of unfailing wealth.

A book en marge to the somewhat operatic Byron tragedy is *Byron, Hobhouse and Foscolo* by E. R. Vincent. It is the strange but fascinating story of a ghost. England and Italy have always exchanged eccentric literary geniuses and the little-known Italian poet Foscolo well deserves the very competent attentions of Mr. Vincent, for a sympathetic, highly amusing and loveable figure emerges. It was not for nothing that Foscolo had translated Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. His letters, the best part of the book, are worthy of the master. Hobhouse met Foscolo at a party after which he became so ill that he did not think he would survive the night—no doubt Algerian wine in Regency bottles—but not before he had asked the indigent Italian poet to provide him with certain material for the illumination of his somewhat sketchy notes for Byron's Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold*. Foscolo was a brilliant ghost. Too brilliant, for the notes soi disant by Hobhouse set the whole of literary Italy on fire. Even Byron had to say, with his usual wounding irony, that he had never read them. But Foscolo's letters to Hobhouse while all was well between them are the best thing in this little gem of a book. The poet was often out when Hobhouse called, or was too ill to join him at Brighton. He wrote in execrable French, though Sterne would have preferred it to the English of his contemporaries . . . je ne pouvais pas pisser pendant tous les derniers jours d'Aout, et que maintenant je pisse difficilement': but in case 'ce vilain mot' should offend he draws a line through it. He has to sell his horse, but somehow he manages to spend a good deal of agreeable time in the Hobhouse family. It was only when the literary Press of two countries became a little insistent about

the ghost's identity and Foscolo's urgent financial situation turned him into a raging Italian lion at bay that their relations became almost impossible, but never quite. Both men had a sense of truth and humour. The difficult situation that so often arises between the rich Englishman and the gifted exile is not a new one. In this case we may say that though most of the letters are very full of financial explanations, it never sank to a really sordid level. We have the feeling that the early nineteenth century, though coarse, was sordid not so stupidly. There was too much life in it. The end of the story is not without pathos. After mixing in the society of the richest country in the world as our own time. Foscolo came to a bad end. By 1827 he had sunk to the level of a hack living at Turnham Green, and there he died, dreaming of the Ionian islands on which his bills of exchange had been drawn, only to be buried in Chiswick cemetery. I have not read so moving a little book for a long time.

To turn from this perfect exhibition of the Romantic stage to Mr. Middleton Murry is like passing from wine to the watery beer of contemporary literary pubs. The portraits in his new book include much of Keats and Coleridge—an unreal dialogue, Wordsworth and Coleridge, a long essay in which Mr. Murry seems to confuse good descriptive verse which he quite wrongly considers prosaic, with the Christmas card rhyme which both Coleridge and Wordsworth were capable of in their worst moments:

To be beloved is all I need
And those I love I love indeed.

We all love the Christmas spirit. No wonder the classicists turned to Donne. The Ancient Mariner himself would have shuddered. Coleridge may have had many personalities but one turns with relief from Mr. Murry's rather dull commentary to the other essays in the book to find that he writes well, as might be expected, of Katherine Mansfield.

The last book on my list I believe to be, and to readers of this magazine I am sure will be, the most exciting of all. *The Last Romantics* by Graham Hough is the first major critical work to deal seriously with the Romantic tradition as it passed through the entire length of the nineteenth century and beyond down to our own day in the figure of W. B. Yeats, and the first to recognize the swing of taste away from the classicism of the generation of T. S. Eliot, and to give serious recognition to the neo-romantic revival of the younger generation of poets which is coming into

being before our eyes. These studies of Ruskin, Rossetti, Morris, Pater and finally W. B. Yeats cast even greater light on these figures which are now enjoying our serious attention, so much more because Mr. Hough, as some critics are not, is able to discuss their work in the field of art, economics, philosophy, religion, poetry, including the problems of our own time with a facility and depth of understanding that will make this book a mile-stone on the road from the old gods of the inter-war period who still held their sway over the 'forties, though the ground was sliding and moving away under their feet, to the new decade on whose theshold we stand. The author was no cloistered don but a man who has known the broad chaos and the full horror of our time, and I believe the new generation of poets will come to *The Last Romantics* as a book indispensable to the study of their own tradition. *An Epilogue*, a conversation between the spirits of Yeats and Wells in Limbo has a wit and depth of understanding that places it on a far higher level than is usual with the average imaginery conversation, and it brings the book to its final decisive resting-place from the great solemn purpose of Ruskin's hatred for the ugliness of the bourgeois world down to our modern scepticism of the survival of anything at all. It is the poet of the ancient gods who alone gives us any hope. Time is an indestructible and ghostly wheel.

WREY GARDINER.

PROGRAMME NOTES ON THE COCKTAIL PARTY

DEAR *Z.*,

Since you want them, here are my on-the-spot reactions to *The Cocktail Party*, garnered from scrawls on my programme and whatever faulty memory can supply. First, please note that the chief characters all 'stand' for something. There are the Chamberlaynes, Mrs. Shuttlethwaite, Celia Coplestone, Peter Quilpe, Sir Henry Harcourt-Riley and Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, the symbolism of whose name escapes me. The title, I think you'll agree, is brilliant. It describes the chief milieu and event of the play; it is also generic to and evocative of our culture. What better (don't scold me!) 'objective correlative' by which to illumine our brittle values? And what a gay, uninnocent *sound* it has! It gears us to the fusion of realism and symbolism (grant me these short-cuts, X.) which is successfully established in the first act. It's the 'realism' of ordinary people, in ordinary (if somewhat expensive) clothes, in an ordinary setting (I heard from X. that Eliot insisted it be as it was—a banal, upper-middle class drawing-room, pretty, even fussy, but basically featureless) involved in some fairly ordinary intrigues. The 'symbolism' gets in largely in what they say, and more especially in *how* they say it. The beat of the verse subtley heightens (imperceptibly, I imagine, for those in the audience who do not carry with them the 'feel' of Eliot's diction as one finds it in—yes—*Sweeney Agonistes* and *Family Reunion*) the persuasiveness of the talk. And because the verse provides a persistent ground-swell of implication, it also prepares the ear for the more transparently poetic passages of which there are several of great beauty.

Now, I won't go on to give you the 'plot' because the newspaper reviews, which I gather you've seen, have done that, although, alas, not even that too well. But I'll have to mention some of the 'actions' because they are intrinsic to what a play means. I think a break-down by acts will be best.

Act I seemed to me particularly draggy. It is over-long and this fault is chiefly because Mrs. Shuttlethwaite, a fluttery, fashionable dowager, lives up to her name and takes some fifteen minutes in *not* getting a funny story told. Edward Chamberlayne, the hero, (athough I can't be sure there is one; certainly Sir Harry is a stronger protagonist of the 'ideas' in the play) has the Prufrockian *malaise*, athough it doesn't seem to interfere with his effect on women. Celia Coplestone, a glamorous society

girl, whose name has to do with the hard way of life she eventually chooses, characterizes Edward her secret lover, in the imagery of 'Gerontion' and *The Wasteland* as 'dry', 'a beetle' and 'a grasshopper'. Nevetheless, it is Edward who later on says some of the profoundest things in the play. It is he who enunciates its Dantesque theme: 'Hell is alone'. (I think I remember rightly), Hell is where *you* are. You project your own damnation or salvation.

Lavinia, the wife, is a less satisfactory character. By her absence, she becomes the centre of interest at the cocktail party but when she returns the next night she does not fulfill the expectation that has been built up of an ambitious domestic impresario. A character who does manage to appear at once in the round, and this in spite of the shadowy territory of mystery, or mystification, which he inhabits, is the hocus-pocusy uninvited guest who makes a witty initial sortie on Edward's troubled psyche. All in all, in spite of its leisurely pace, this act does establish tone, direction and interest.

In Act II the emotional dimension shifts and the symbolic texture of the play becomes more dominant. It is now that the unknown guest Sir Henry Harcourt-Riley, becomes the focus of the action. It is he who decides that Celia requires a life of service and sacrifice and who encourages her to go to the tropics as a nurse in a religious order. It is he who the Chamberlaynes consult in turn, and then, significantly, together. Sir Henry is an unorthodox psychiatrist, if he is one, but merely to call him a doctor, as in the play, is equally unsatisfactory. He is, more ambiguously, a principle of authority, a father-principle, as it were, whether seen in the guise of physician or priest. He has an aura compounded both of holiness and charlatanry. I can't but think that the interpretation of this remarkable figure by Alec Guiness, who even used a few vaguely clerical gestures, may not emphasize the quality in him closest to Eliot's intention. I'd even go further and guess that it is *through* Sir Henry that Eliot wishes us to approach the play. Sir Harry is the apex of the human hierarchy in which the other characters are ranged. It is not so much that he is the best of them, but that he integrates most functionally the aspects of the temporal and the 'divine' which, in the others, is more fragmentarily realized. Celia, of course, is meant to eventually transcend the human scale altogether.

This fusion of the planes of reality is not so happily achieved in the persons of Julia and Alex, two of the seemingly trivial characters, who are now revealed as Sir Henry's unofficial assis-

tants and thus among 'The Guardians'. When the three drink a stylized toast to the Guardians (themselves) they intone poetry reminiscent of the incantatory passages of the *Quartets.* Julia speaks a particularly lovely section, a prayer to the moon invoking fertility. I must repeat that, for me, these Guardians are not entirely convincing. In the *Family Reunion* the Eumenides were a consistently abstract deus-ex-machina. The alternative to this is a Sir Henry, not an abstraction at all, although incorporating in his rich personality some similar principles of authority. But Alex and Julia do not coalesce their separate aspects into a convincing unit of human personality. Alex, I should add, is a most attractive fellow in his worldly shape as a cynical but just civil servant. He emerges with considerable power in the third Act and I sensed an affectionate motive in the Shavian charm with which his creator endows him.

Act III is just talk, and very good talk, but without a denouement in terms of event. It's again the eve of a cocktail party, two years later, at the Chamberlaynes and the stage is flooded with light. The same people are present, with the exception of Celia, and there is a sense of having come full circle. Alex, returned from Africa, brings his report of Celia's gruesome but satisfactorily martyr-like death at the hands of the natives, who now propitiate her as a goddess. The Quilpe boy—the merest thumbnail of a 'character'—returns from the United States with a loud voice and a loud tie. This means he's made good in Hollywood. Lavinia is softer, prettier and mellower .Even Edward looks alive and vibrant. Now there is a grand confessional in which everyone takes turns telling the others what ails them. The analyses are excellent but the pretexts for them seem contrived. The crucial moment comes when they ask Sir Harry to explain how he was able to predict Julia's death. He disclaims knowing how he knows. (And, maybe, we feel, he doesn't.) He says he saw the image of violent death for Celia from the first. He adds that sometimes he chooses life and sometimes ruin for his patients. At this point he sounds more like the Church than like any brand of psychiatry I know. He tells them that Celia's decision to 'lead the way of life that leads to death' was right; that the others must not feel responsible, and that he will explain further if he may recite some poetry. Then comes the Shelley bit about Zoroaster meeting his own image in the garden. This is, I take it, what everyone in the play has been doing—meeting and coming to terms with their own images.

We are back now, as I think I needn't tell *you,* in the terrain

that Eliot made his own in the *Quartets*. We hear that Death is a kind of life; that all of the ways of life lead to death, and that we must accept our destinies ('lot') and go to Bothwell to do a corny film (Quilpe) or give our cocktail parties (the Chamberlaynes) if that is our role. It is the grace and the spirit with which we do these human things that counts. The curtain goes down on Edward and Julia, hand in hand, going to greet their party guests. It is this newly-authoritative Edward who has assured Quilpe that he is a 'good' person. And somehow we believe it too. It is this deepened Edward who says that each new breath is a beginning; that we continually begin; that even death is a beginning.

What do I think of it all? Exciting, but imperfect. Then too I want to read it. Or, at the least, see it again. Just now my mind is filled with too many distractions of actors' voices, faces, clothes, setting, etc., to allow my judgment to be a 'pure' one. But for the play, itself, if these externals *can* or *should*, for the moment, be pushed aside, I'd say it is a study of 'redemption' but presented in secular and not in institutional terms. Further, that the terms themselves imply that redemption can be found *in* the world and through the *way* we live in it. It's as if Eliot were recapitulating the successive positions of his own spiritual biography, beginning with the nihilism of *Sweeney Agonistes* and going right on through the whole laborious ascent. One could, I think, almost plot each character as a projection of the various spiritual stages Eliot has objectified in each of his major phases. And, if this is not too drearily and old-fashionedly Jungian, dear Z., I think we might call the play a 're-enactment' of Eliot's deepest conflicts, crises and their final resolution. The human condition, says Edward, (who, the more I think about him, seems very close to Eliot) is aloneness. (Incidentally, there's a surprising lot about romantic 'love' in Act I and somehow it came through to me with a confessional poignance). And the greatest aloneness is in the life of the imagination, in so far as we all, and not only the artist, make our own worlds for ourselves. Which is real, the dreamer or the dream, asks Edward in some beautiful, Yeatsian lines. All human ways are alone *and* together. Or, as an American poet has put it, 'Let's be alone together'.

VIVIENNE KOCH.

THREE VINTAGES

The Canticle of the Rose by EDITH SITWELL (Macmillan, 15s.). *Collected Poems* by LOUIS MACNEICE (Faber, 12s. 6d.). *The Pythoness* by KATHLEEN RAINE (Hamish Hamilton, 6s.)

WHENEVER a woman poet in this country is under review, there is a tendency amongst critics, which I seize this opportunity to deplore, to introduce the irrelevant and discrepant names of Sappho, Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. But an alliance of Dr. Sitwell's name with any of these, except in a specific study of women poets, must always rest on grounds other than poetic ones, and appears to me as ill-conceived as would the introduction of Mr. MacNeice's name into that company, and as incongruous as an actual comparison, drawn recently, between Miss Kathleen Raine and Emily Dickinson.

For Dr. Sitwell, then, I prefer to find a counterpart, so far as the progress of her work is concerned, in Yeats. Like Yeats, she is a poet whose work has undergone three phases; like Yeats, also, she is in a category by herself, and although her lifetime has seen the literary vogues of Georgianism, 'Thirtyism, and Neo-romanticism, her work belongs to none of these. The comparison may be extended to show how the basic symbols of these two minds are consistent throughout their poetry; and how the three main stages of their work are delineated by variations in style. There cannot, however, be any closer identification of Dr. Sitwell with Yeats, and a consideration of their names together can best serve to illustrate, in the differences between them, the points at which Dr. Sitwell lacks the greatness of Yeats; for whereas the latter, throughout the course of his work, adopted new forms and methods appropriate to his changing attitude, Dr. Sitwell's progress is marked by a preoccupation with fresh and vaster subject matter, with which she has felt it necessary to clothe an increasingly grandiose style. I hasten to stress a distinction here between the alterating attitude of Yeats and Dr. Sitwell's acquisition of new subject-matter, since the latter is too often accepted as implying a proportionate profundity of approach—a judgment which I feel to be superficial; and I would make a further distinction between the subordination of Yeats' style to his subject and the reverse order in Dr. Sitwell's poetry. This is not to question the relative values of Yeats' and Dr. Sitwell's respective attitudes, but merely to sug-

gest that Dr. Sitwell's excuse for a mounting grand manner is not so valid as might be supposed. In fact, her later style, peppered with capital letters and garnished with undefined abstracts, is deceptive.

Compare, for instance, the early lines,

Each dull blunt wooden stalactite
Of rain creaks, hardened by the light,
Sounding like an overtone
From some lonely world unknown.

(*Bucolic Comedies*)

Though it is buried beneath black bones
Of the fetiches screeching like overtones
Of the light, as they feel the slave's spilt blood.

(*Gold Coast Customs*)

with the much later,

There were great emerald thunders in the air
In the violent Spring, the thunders of the sap
and the blood in the heart
The Spiritual Light, the physical Revelation.

(*The Shadow of Cain*)

and it will be seen that, by removing the capital letters in the latter passage, the expression becomes commonplace; the imagistic language, so evocative in the earlier lines, flags into the inevitability of '*violent* Spring', 'the blood in the heart', 'the spiritual light', etc.; the transference of attention from the red-herring capital letters is all-revealing. In 'thunders of the sap' we may find an echo of the early, incisive note, though even this phrase sounds unhealthily like a refrain from the super-romantic theme song. Only in such lines—too infrequent in her later work—as 'There were great emerald thunders in the air', do we find that Dr. Sitwell is still capable of her earlier diction; there is all evidence to show that could she but step off the superlative pinnacles of Death, Light, Eternity, Cold, she would be forced to exercise that verbal dexterity in which she so excels.

For economy's sake I have deliberately chosen extracts that will further serve to demonstrate what is really important in Dr. Sitwell's poetry: that is, the combination of a highly-developed sensibility with a singular sense of imagery. In the first extract, for instance, the image of light appears as an indurating agent

to the rain: a fresh conception of the sense-texture of rain is suggested, and enhanced by the sound-image in the next line. The second passage, from a poem published some six years later, shows a rearrangement of the first set of images, where the simile presents 'overtones of the light' as possessing aural properties. This manipulation of sense-impression is the most successful part of Dr. Sitwell's technique.

Her uniqueness, in fact, lies in her power to represent the fabrics of sensation rather than the textures of thought and emotion:

> *I who was once a golden woman like those who walk*
> *In the dark heavens—but am now grown old*
> *And sit by the fire, and see the fire grown cold*

illustrates how comparatively crude and antithetical her emotional responses are; here are no overtones or subtle lights, but the extremes of youth and age, warmth and cold.

The degree of sensibility which predominates in the best work of Dr. Sitwell, is the least part of Mr. MacNeice's equipment; nor is he a poet of the emotions; instead, his most stimulating work is a cerebral achievement.—I do not suggest, of course, that emotion and sensibility are absent from his poetry, nor do I think it is without emotional impact; but that the intellect is both the restraining and the driving spirit. Thought, however, is for Mr. MacNeice, at once his making and his unmaking, for whilst it has led him to penetrate most possibilities of human behaviour, it has prevented him from transcending the disillusionment attendant upon his quest.

Disillusionment, however, is not a constituent of major poetry, even presupposing other poetic excellences to be present, unless it is resolved to some extent. Mr. MacNeice's intellectual *métier* must necessarily find no solution to the questions it evokes: an answer would always be, in terms of logic, illusory. The major poet of our time, T. S. Eliot, has, indeed, propounded such an answer to the questions of disillusionment, but one that could not have been arrived at through the extreme findings of the intelligence alone. But Mr. MacNeice could not possibly have undergone a change in his general approach to things, unless he were to have relinquished his most suitable poetic instrument, that of the intellect; and remains, therefore, a minor poet of a distinctive calibre.

The dedicatory poem to his Collected Works shows that he harbours no illusions, even about himself,

Askance at the coming gods, estranged from those older
For having lived, and too much, in the present,
Who had created my fathers in their image . . .

His importance rests, however, on the circumstance of his "having lived, and too much, in the present", for if Mr. MacNeice's poetry is limited by a too-powerful consciousness of his ethos, the historic durability of his work is thereby assured; whilst he is subject to that compulsion that seemed to seize the 'thirties poets, to occupy their poetic powers in the current business of society, he has observed the panorama of our time with particular detachment. His poem of the early 'thirties, *To a Communist,*

But before you proclaim the millenium, my dear,
Consult the barometer—
This poise is perfect but maintained
For one day only.

conveys as little emotional interestedness as do his remarks on a pacifist, in the early 'forties,

A crowd of odd components mutter and press
For compromise with fact, longing to be combined
Into a working whole but cannot jostle through
The permanent bottleneck of his high-mindedness.

To have become emotionally implicated in his theme would not have served Mr. MacNeice's status as a poet, other than to give his work a 'period' (as distinct from an historical) interest. Having "lived, and too much", in the present, he has nevertheless focussed the light of a lucid mind upon it.

His style, too, is a product of clear thinking. Mobile and flexible, it yet resists those temptations of poetic language extraneous to the poem in question; this process has in itself become a mannerism, but one peculiar to Mr. MacNeice. It is not, however, in fastidious diction or unexpected imagery that his stylistic achievement lies, but in his arrangement of words and phrases; his epigrammatical facility.

The type and degree of sensibility manifest in Dr. Sitwell, and of thought in Mr. MacNeice, are not present in Miss Raine's poetry; nor would it be adequate to say she is an emotional poet. Yet if emotion is not the keynote of her work, it is the underlying *motif,* a current which directs the astatic quality of her thought and her delicate perceptiveness.

Miss Raine's early pantheistic approach to nature owes its originality to the charged, emotional undertones present in it.

Yours is the face that the earth turns to me.
Continuous beyond its human features lie
The mountain forms that rest against the sky.

As a poet of Christianity, Miss Raine's approach is equally original, and more or less heretical; the Christian theme in the poetry which belongs to this further stage in her development, being subservient to the type of emotional-pantheism she retained from her earlier work:

Those eyes that opened on our earth at Bethlehem
Were the world's young eyes; the eyes of birds,
Wild creatures that knew earth's secret places,

presents an attitude to nature through Christianity, rather than the reverse.

Miss Raine's latest volume contains the basic elements of her former work. Here, however, the emotion is more subdued and a deeper meditative faculty predominates. But her progress is marked to a greater extent by a change in style. At a time when many of her contemporaries are frothing up their compositions with increasing doses of adjectival gas, Miss Raine's diction and forms are undergoing a distilling and refining process.

The hurrying dust
Has never a face,
No longer human
In man or woman.

There are, in fact, no more than three adjectives, all of them pertinent and decisive, in this four-stanza poem, yet the impact possesses all the force that the theme requires.

Austerity may be a negative virtue to claim for a new work by an interesting poet; nevertheless it shows Miss Raine's artistry to her advantage. If her earlier vitality is not conspicuous in her latest volume, she has at least drawn a propitious outline for the embodiment of her poetry in the future.

MURIEL SPARK.